DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 873 JC 020 065

AUTHOR Clark, Virginia F.
TITLE Reactions of Nontraditional Women Students in an Introductory Class: Quilting Conversations.
INSTITUTION DeKalb Community Coll., Clarkston, GA.
PUB DATE 2001-10-27
NOTE 50p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Students; *Basic Writing; Community Colleges; Developmental Studies Programs; *Females; *Nontraditional Students; Two Year College Students; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS Georgia

ABSTRACT

This discussion paper focuses on nontraditional female students in a developmental writing class at a small two-year college in Georgia. Through interviews, focus groups, and observation, the study discovered that women are entering college in greater numbers than ever, and the colleges, at times, have difficulty in building support systems and course work that will encourage these older students to stay in school and learn effectively. This paper presents a review of the literature concerning the nontraditional female student in college, composition theory and basic writing pedagogy, and women's thought and higher education. The report also discusses two women's stories, in particular a single mother who returned to school to become an elementary physical education teacher, and an older mother who hoped to update her computer skills and possibly become a kindergarten teacher. The paper discusses each of the two women in terms of a type of quilt, or a pattern their lives might represent. Quilts and quilt patterns are used as metaphors for the many layers of experience that these nontraditional students bring to class. (Contains 66 references.) (EMH)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 459 873

Reactions of Nontraditional Women Students in an Introductory Class: Quilting Conversations

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

V.F. Clark

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Virginia F. Clark, Ph.D.

IR020065

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

REACTIONS OF NONTRADITIONAL WOMEN STUDENTS IN AN INTRODUCTORY CLASS:
QUILTING CONVERSATIONS

My interest in the nontraditional, or older, college student began about ten years ago when I began teaching as an adjunct instructor at DeKalb Technical Institute, now college. Since that time, I've taught for five years in a two year state college and am currently at a large suburban high school as a reading specialist by day, and, again, as an evening adjunct instructor of developmental reading and English at DeKalb Technical College. This discussion is taken from my research about the nontraditional female students in a developmental writing class at a small two-year college in Georgia. Through interviews, focus group and observation, I had originally hoped to discover the sources of their motivation, including family, life situation changes, and self esteems they attended college after a full life away from academia. What I discovered is that women are entering college in greater numbers than ever and the colleges, at times, have difficulty in building support systems and course work that will encourage these older students to stay in school and learn effectively. In fact, one purpose of the whole research project was to discover programs that were working for the nontraditional students on college campuses. I am limiting this piece to a discussion of only two of the four women who I whose lives I entered through their frank sharing, although the other two stories are equally interesting and rewarding in the ranges of comments.

The three major strands to the preliminary search of literature concerning the nontraditional female student in basic composition courses should be briefly acknowledged: the nontraditional student in college; composition theory and basic writing pedagogy; and women's thought and higher education. In the realm of the nontraditional student, I relied on Arthur

TC020065

Chickering's (1991) study of student development models and the historical perspective offered by Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer's (1996) study of the American community college as well as other studies of change within colleges as a result of the influx of adult learners for background information.

After the civil rights protests of the 1960s, college admissions became open to another group of students, those who previously had not considered college or prepared themselves for academic life. In Errors and Expectations, Mina Shaughnessey (1977) movingly described these new students entering City University of New York and their hopes:

> They were in college now for one reason: that their lives might be better than their parents', that the lives of their children might be better than theirs so far had been. Just how college was to accomplish these changes was not at all clear, but the faith that education was the one available route to change empowered large numbers of students who had already endured twelve years of compulsory schooling to choose to go college when the doors of City University suddenly swung open (p. 3).

These younger nontraditional students generally came from families who had not attended college because of economic class, race or ethnic group, were not well prepared academically, but still looked for a better life after college. The older students often had the same characteristics and added age to the list of differences from the traditional student.

The number of older female college students has grown from 15.9% in 1970 to approximately 34.5% in 1994. The National Center for Education Statistics reported this more than doubling of attendance in its 1996 report (Snyder, 1996). In 1994, for comparison, women of traditional age (21 and under) made up 20.6% of college attendees with their young male counterparts comprising approximately 17.5% and older men making up 27.1% of all college students. Very soon, the total number of women of nontraditional college age should be

approximately 33% of the student enrollment (Snyder, 1996).

Still more recently, Hanna Ashar and Robert Skenes (1993) questioned Tinto's 1975 attrition model and its applicability to nontraditional students. According to Tinto, lack of social and intellectual integration into college was a primary factor in a student's leaving before graduation. Ashar and Skenes research was based on management-level male students in a business education class. One finding of interest was that adult learners tended to focus on the "class" in contrast to the "institution," indicating that programs designed with small class sizes, intact groups of students, and nonthreatening climates have successfully reduced student attrition.

As nontraditional students have entered the college classroom, scholars have argued that their success has depended on their socioeconomic background and amount of personal intellectual development (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Kraemer, 1996; Murphy, 1994; Oliver, 1995; Tinto, 1975). Beginning in the middle of the 1970s, retention of nontraditional students was noted as a different matter than that of traditional college students. Tinto listed family background, individual attributes and pre college schooling as factors that led to making or not making strong commitments to academic / career goals or to the college itself. These background factors would influence the social and academic integration of the beginning student into her college. While Tinto's work focused on the traditional student, a nontraditional student with the outside responsibilities of work and family would be less likely to be able to make the commitment to college be her first priority. For example, near Philadelphia, Eastern College has designed a cohort program to give the nontraditional student a greater sense of support and community. The relationships established in the Eastern College model seemed to decrease the anxiety of the nontraditional students as they handled family, work, and course responsibilities

simultaneously. The support of and motivation from the group developed during a term and allowed students to successfully handle increasingly difficult and complex assignments (Kilcrease, 1995). In yet another study of the motivation of adult and younger undergraduates, Mary E. Wolfgang and William D. Dowling (1981) found that the adults scored higher in terms of Morstain and Smart's six motivational factors: social relationships, external expectations, social welfare, professional advancement, escape stimulation, cognitive interest.

In 1991, only 10 years later, John P. Bean and Barbara S. Metzner studied the older, part-time and commuter students and their attrition patterns. These two researchers used age, enrollment status, educational goals, high school performance, ethnicity and gender as pre-college attributes as variables in their sample. According to Bean and Metzner, a traditional college student lived on campus, was between 18 and 24 years old and attended college full-time while a nontraditional student commuted, was over age 24 and attended classes part-time. This student was usually less involved in campus socialization factors such as faculty and student peers. Bean and Metzner found that usefulness of course work, stress, outside encouragement from family, friends, or employer, and intent to leave the institution before actually graduating were the most important variables when predicting institutional attrition. By the time of this study, the nontraditional students were the majority of students found at the increased number of community colleges and comprised 40% of all students.

One apparent need has been to offer access to higher education to working adults, including those entering post secondary education for the first time. The reasons these students seemed to have chosen to continue their education included vocational training, remedial education, transfer preparation, and continuing education. Whatever their purposes, adults often found that the

community colleges with their flexibility, geographic and academic accessibility met their needs for further education.

Another curriculum issue involving adult students was remediation – the developmental courses in English, mathematics and reading. Rita Culross (1996) noted that adult students often lacked the basic skills required for enrollment in some college-level courses because they either failed to take the prerequisite courses in high school, or because they needed some review to be prepared for college level courses after time out of formal education. One answer to this need was having adults with remedial needs enroll in a community college which could deliver the needed courses at a lower cost than a 4-year institution (Culross, 1996).

The challenges of student diversity faced by the Jefferson Community College faculty in revising the general requirements was one aspect of the dilemma of the community college as it admitted traditional and nontraditional students. Christopher Oliver (1995) surveyed community colleges in New York and noted several negative outcomes of open enrollment. First, many nontraditional students began course work by taking enrichment or continuing education courses that might not lead to the academic skills needed for the standard degree program. Another negative outcome Oliver noted was that many students entered the community college for ulterior reasons such as unemployment benefits, while the purpose of the benefits was retraining or upgrading of job skills. Third, an open-door policy could result in a "watered down" instruction which could occur when there was a majority of academically unprepared students. A fourth negative outcome was the registering of students who lacked the academic skills to succeed in college as determined by pre-admission basic skills tests. Some of these individuals enrolled in classes, but did not even attend one class while others simply did not complete the admissions

process. Another difficulty Oliver pointed out was the necessity for community colleges to offer a variety of orientation classes for students. While this was a positive teaching practice, because of lower funding at the 2-year level, the size of the orientation classes was often too large to be of as much value to the students as smaller sized classes would be.

Attempting to meet the needs of an academically diverse adult students population could be a part of these negative outcomes at the community college. Colleges are just beginning to serve these students and meet the challenges Oliver (1995) described in his survey of New York State institutions. In writing of the difficulties adults have in making a successful transition to college from the workforce or home, Malcolm Knowles, as cited in Elizabeth Steltenpohl and Jane Shipton's (1986) article on adults in community colleges, stated, 'it is a sad commentary that, of all our social institutions, colleges and universities have been among the slowest to respond to adult learners. Steltenpohl and Shipton describe the entering adult learners as lacking in confidence in their ability to learn, uncertain about expectations for college-level work, lacking in information about how college services work, and having rusty academic skills. At Empire State College in Old Westbury, New York, a profile of 115 students in a voluntary course introducing them to college indicated that 73% were women and of the new female students, 47% listed business as an intended major, 20% listed community and human services, and 14 percent listed teaching. This introductory course stressed self-assessment and basic skill building, taught through an experiential approach which moved students from concrete learning to more abstract as required by college level work. The idea of being an adult learner was new to most of these students, thus a goal of the course was to empower students to take responsibility for their own learning in the same manner they have taken responsibility for other areas of their lives. Courses

such as this one are similar to the much heralded "Freshman Experience" program which was designed to make the academic experience more successful for the traditional college age student, but these gatherings are designed specifically for the adult with life experience. When students left this course, it was for typical adult reasons such as family responsibilities, paid work load, or health factors. The facilitators of the course and the adult students considered the course rewarding and very helpful to college success.

For information about composition and pedagogy, especially for the developmental learner, I turned to Mina Shaughnessey of City University of New York and her accounts of the earliest nontraditional students in developmental studies classes (1977). David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky gave me valuable insights in teaching developmental studies through their description of a combined developmental reading and writing class they devised in Pittsburgh (1986). Jean Henry of Northern Kentucky University and Marcia Dickson of Ohio State University of Marion described their developmental reading and writing programs, respectively, and led me to change several of my own teaching practices (1995, 1996). Henry and Dickson, in turn, based their teaching practices on Nanci Atwell's experiences with middle school students and her creation of the reading and writing workshops, grounded in the belief that reading and writing were inextricably entwined (1987).

Composition and basic writing theory recall American 'Nine Patch' quilt design with its patterns based on a square divided into nine parts, but each of the nine parts may include different shapes, just as composition theory gives structure to formal writing and basic writers add their knowledge to the original pattern. In classic composition theory, the tradition and models arise from works as early as the Greek and Roman rhetorical patterns. In the first century, Quintillian

wrote a complete set of instructions for beginning rhetors [orators] which became incorporated into writing theory in which a statement was supported and elaborated on by several points and repeated at the end of the expository piece (Murphy, 1987). Corbett (1990) used the classical tradition in his textbooks for college English. Into his modern text for the college writer, he incorporated the five canons of rhetoric: discovery [or argument], arrangement or organization, style, memorization, and delivery. The classical tradition gives a grounding to the writing of modern students, and can be especially valuable to the novice or basic academic writer (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986; Troyka & Nudleman, 1999). The variety of experiences the non-traditional basic writers bring to their writing make for great differences in their writing, much as different fabrics change each Nine Patch quilt square. The different life experiences and writing topics are reminiscent of the classical tradition in rhetoric of inventiveness and varying the purpose of writing or speaking piece.

At some point in the basic writing classroom, most learners of all ages realized they needed to know college level writing skills. This knowing that they did not know was often a first step toward real progress toward college level performance (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986; Dickson, 1995; Rose, 1983). Once this realization took place, the students were more open to accepting the assistance the learning support or developmental studies instructor offered them. (Frederickson, 1998; Jaffe, 1997).

The instructor needed an awareness of the needs of both traditional and nontraditional students to plan learning activities that would meet their needs. One group of activities involved prior knowledge of text content (Code, 1991; Craig, 1995; Papatzikou-Cochran, 1994). Instructors have found that by incorporating students' background knowledge into composition

topics, the quality of the writing would be greatly improved as students displayed what they knew in a polished format (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986).

In the late 1970s, David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky (1986), basic (developmental) writing instructors at the University of Pittsburgh, realized that there was more to developmental studies than simply writing. The basic writing student was marginally prepared in reading as well as writing. The obvious solution was to teach both skills in one class. In one class, Bartholomae and Petrosky taught writing process, pre-writing, revision, peer editing, beginning research methods, critical thinking, and writing academic English.

The detailed plans for this course showed the relationship between writing and reading. In a six credit, 2-semester class, students read and discussed 12 books and wrote 25 finished papers, including drafts and revisions. The students read serious books, ranging from modern novels to more challenging, yet accessible popular works of non-fiction (Gail Sheehy's Passages, for one). The actual course work was based on a course for advanced graduate students in which students developed their own ideas and theories on a subject and reported what they learned to others, rather like a seminar. One semester, the general topic was "growth and change in adolescence" and the reading, writing, reporting, and discussions led to students' thoughtful interpretations of that topic. Another group of activities involved student collaboration on writing projects. Collaborative learning meant working together in a more literary or even artistic manner. Kathleen McCormick (1994) cited Freire's active approach to education as she incorporated the collaborative model into her classrooms. Students learned better through active participation in the research and writing process than the lecture and solitary writer methodologies. When students completed their collaborative projects, these essays became the reading for that class day

and were graded by the entire class, giving the pleasure of 'publication' as well as the pain of public criticism to each group of authors (McCormick, 1994).

Murray (1985) and Atwell's (1987) techniques and discoveries confirmed writing instructors' suspicions that reading and writing were inextricable entwined; that as one skill increased, the other followed closely. As a student learned to read better, the writing improved, and the reading comprehension increased as did the quality and quantity of writing. Donald Murray wrote about how a writer writes; Atwell took his process and incorporated it into her eighth grade classroom as the "Reading / Writing Workshop" in which students wrote, read, peer edited, participated in mini lessons on common grammar problems, and shared their works with each other. This research on teaching methodology in the elementary school has been replicated and expanded on the post secondary level, initially by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky in their developmental reading and writing classes at the University of Pittsburgh. (Bartholomae & Petrosky, 1986; Dickson, 1995; Henry, 1992).

More recently, Marcia Dickson (1995) used a similar pedagogy in her classes of novice or beginning writers at Ohio State University at Marion, a 2-year division of Ohio State University. She employed a distance / personal sequencing of reading and writing in which students first read and wrote about familiar, personal topics and then wrote and read about more abstract, academic ideas, removed from the world of their personal experiences. Her students, fifty percent of nontraditional age, were from working-class backgrounds, most worked full-time, and commuted to classes. Dickson found the work of Eliot Wigginton of the Foxfire School helpful in designing her course, filled with the investigation life experiences and group activities in which students compared and probed each other's histories (Wigginton, 1985).

In a similar manner, Jeanne Henry (1995) of Northern Kentucky University adapted Nancie Atwell's reading workshop for college developmental reading classes. Henry's students read books of their own choice, write letters to Henry about these books, and read Henry's individual responses to them about their comments on books ranging from Stephen King's The Shining to Danielle Steel's Secrets. The students read, thought, wrote to their instructor and classmates, and learned in the process strategies that would allow them to read and write competently in college level classes.

A long-time observer of nontraditional students and practitioner in the field of basic writing, Lynn Quitman Troyka (1985) wrote of the 1980s as the decade of the nontraditional student because of the increasing number of these students entering and being recruited by American colleges. She found nontraditional students with similar characteristics as those in the present study: often the first generation in a family to attend college, working, without strong literacy skills, often foreign-born, and, in many cases, female. Troyka presented vignettes of two students who seemed to risk time, money, dreams, and self-esteem to attend classes at the City University of New York. From these descriptions, Troyka drew four legacies that determine how instructors can teach these new students.

First, nontraditional students are social which means to an observant instructor that group activities may be more successful for learning than the traditional solitary writer at a desk setting. Oral rather than written modes are more comfortable for nontraditional students, making reading aloud and simulation games in which reading and writing are essential elements appropriate to these new students. Troyka reports a side benefit of the class read-alouds is that students often begin to read to their children. A third discovery is that non-traditional students are holistic

thinkers, seeing the world as a connected whole, not separate parts. This view of the world may put these students in conflict with traditional college instructors who see the world inductively, with the small details first, then moving toward the whole. An instructor may express concern about a grammar error before recognizing the ideas expressed. For quicker understanding, the students need models and structured plans that guide them from generalizations to specifics as they develop their writing patterns. A final legacy is an ambivalence about learning. Nontraditional students may want to learn, but they realize that college may bring changes to their lives and change can be risky. The changes brought about by attending college could impact family relationships, jobs, and even a sense of self; sometimes the fear of change causes a promising student to leave college (Troyka, 1985).

If modern composition theory embraced collaboration, prior knowledge and linking writing and reading, then many of these pedagogical stances seemed closely aligned to women's development, adult learning, and feminist pedagogy. In the developmental writing classes I have taught, it was common to have at least three, even four women in their thirties busily taking notes, asking questions, and, most important, writing essays. To teach them effectively, an instructor needed to know what motivated them, through what activities did they learn most effectively, and how to reach them as students with needs different from the traditional young female student.

When women return to college, three possible factors often come together. Two have just been discussed: adult learning, women's development. In addition, there is feminist pedagogy. Catherine Marienau and Kathleen Taylor suggested linking these three approaches together by using several strategies, including journal writing, acknowledging prior knowledge, pairing women with mentors, using learning centered strategies based on women's development and

experiences, and planning a developmentally oriented core curriculum for women returning to college (Taylor & Marienau, 1995). This conjunction of factors is especially noticeable in the composition classroom.

Women are often seen as connectors, relaters, gatherers together of relations, ideas, household goods, and, now, more recently, of ideas and experiences. Women, according to Carol Gilligan and slightly later, to Mary Belenky et al, place importance on using their experiences to connect new ideas to those they have had in place for a time (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982). When making a decision, women consider not only the rightness or wrongness of a situation, but how will it affect others. This web-like pattern of thinking comes to a women as she grows from not having thoughts or opinions to a woman with confidence in herself as a thinker. Although the work of Mary Belenky and her follow researchers is only one way of understanding how women think, it seemed to resonate with my experiences with nontraditional college students.

This joining of different ideas together works well in society, in families, in business, but how does it impact a woman's learning an academic process -- one which she may have been exposed to previously, but has lost from lack of use. Women have gathered together in the past to make quilts from scraps of old, outworn clothing, of fabric left over from making garments and household decorations, thus the idea of creating something from small pieces is not original. The various quilt patterns pictured and described throughout this article serve as similes, visual representations of the four informants and of topics that informed my analysis of the data collected during the project. In many basic writing classes, such as the classes Mina Shaughnessey taught at City University of New York, the content generally focuses on learning

the technical language of English as used in the academy, of framing thoughts into the set format of a short essay (Shaughnessy, 1977). Yet this learning experience is not a solitary process. Teacher and student piece knowledge and thoughts together in much the same way women work together around a quilting frame, discussing their lives and their work as they join the fabric together. As a woman who is returning to formal education engages in the learning process, how does this thinking pattern of bringing together bits and pieces of information, life experiences, and internal knowledge function as she learns or relearns to write academic English?

The quilt image became stronger as I read literature about adult learners, women's thinking and basic writings. Explanation of quilting is in order because the techniques of quilting are from a long ago era and perhaps unfamiliar to the modern reader. Women sorted through worn garments, found the most usable sections of fabric, cut those into squares, triangles or other shapes, and pieced them into the quilt patterns. In Once Upon a Quilt, Celine Blanchard Mahler (1973) describes women in early America as devising "colorful patterns, ingeniously using every scrap of fabric they could find . . . named them after their colonies, their husbands' work, their dreams, their frustrations, their God, and stories from the Bible" (p. 7). While sewing the small pieces of fabric into a complete quilt top, the women could be alone or in a group, but to join the completed pattern forming the top of a quilt to the warm lining and sturdy backing, they gathered around a frame which supported the three layers of material. While they made the tiny stitches that held the layers together, the women were not silent. They talked. They discussed, argued, commiserated, planned, and dreamed (Mahler, 1973).

Each of the four woman who completed the project drew me toward a specific quilt

pattern because of circumstances in her life. For Linda with her complex family relationships, a Log Cabin quilt seemed appropriate. In the center of each quilt block is a square around which longer strips of fabric are connected, much as Linda was the center point for her extended family. For younger Beth, the rollicking near movements of the Baby's Block quilt seemed to fit the highs and lows of her life thus far, as well as her devotion to her little son. These images grew stronger as I read, listened and wrote about the women and theories about their experiences in college.

The motivation of nontraditional students may be partially explained by a close reading of the research by Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule (Belenky et al., 1986). Thought patterns found in their various research groups' stages of epistemological development may have a relationship with college success. In the second state of interviews in my project, I made an attempt to tease out the stage of development or 'knowing' at which each traditional and nontraditional student places herself.

Mary Field Belenky, et al.(1986), spent 5 years listening to women describe themselves, their experiences, their lives and their reactions to their experiences. Their primary work, Women's Ways of Knowing, was influenced by Carol Gilligan's earlier research on women's ethics and decision making processes which she described in In a Different Voice (Gilligan, 1982). In their work as psychologists, Belenky, et al. had realized that for many women, the "real" lessons learned came out of relationships with friends and teachers, life crises and community involvements. The researchers set out to discover the ways of learning, knowing, and valuing that are special for women. Using the metaphor of voice, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule identified five stages of development in the way women know: silence, received, subjective, procedural, and constructed. These voices are not sequentially developed as are

Piaget's stages of learning.

The first of the voices the research group distinguished was hardly a voice at all; in fact, it was called "silence" for these women were passive, reactive, and dependent. The self knowledge these women had was not from themselves, but from others' opinions and views of them. They could only represent in words present, actual, concrete, specific things, and acts they had actually done. They were not connected to others, and found it almost impossible to describe themselves.

In the next stage, a woman received knowledge by listening to the voices of friends, authorities, and others in her community. They were still passive, not trying to understand, but simply accepting what they heard from others without internalizing the new ideas. They saw themselves through the eyes of others, and as a result, had a great need to live up to others' expectations.

The next stage in the ways women know was the subjective stage, in which a great shift occurs. For the first time, a woman was aware of her own inner self and strength. This was the first stage in active listening and the development of an inner self and inner strength. Often this shift in thinking was a result of being let down by authorities, especially men, but also by other women, books, and "the system." The women interviewed called their new confidence "just knowing" or "a certain feeling you have inside you"(Belenky et al.,1986, p. 134). This shift enabled women to separate feelings and ideas, to listen inwardly, and to plan their own lives on a different level than in the earlier two stages.

When a woman entered Belenky et al.'s (1986) procedural level of thinking, she began to have confidence in her own thoughts while integrating the thoughts of others, the people with whom she connected her own thinking. The woman gained a voice of reasoning, and she realized

understanding and knowledge were different. Belenky described understanding as a personal acquaintance with an idea, accepting, and one further step, evaluating an idea. The knowledge was separate from an object, with mastery of an object or idea, and it was all right to doubt something learned through others, books or experiences.

The final stage in thinking was the constructed stage, in which old ways were challenge. Often, the consideration of a person's views versus subject content led to conscious, deliberate, systematic analysis of an issue. This led to an individual's establishing an integrated perspective on a subject, or taking a stand. The learning was connected throughout subject areas, not only academic disciplines, but also life situations, relationships, and experiences. This was the highest level discovered by Belenky and her associates 1986), and was not reached by all women. Those who did attain constructed knowledge have integrated their intuitive knowledge with what was important ideas learned from others and trusted these thoughts.

In the many interviews conducted by Mary Belenky and her associates, the terms "connected," "integrating," and "blending" appeared in the descriptions of how women thought about themselves and their ideas. These terms reminded me of the quilting process as the final three layers were stitched together by a group of women. The researchers used the metaphor of speaking and voice to describe how women gathered knowledge from inside and outside themselves. While quilting is a visual art medium, the artwork is usually produced by a group working together as a group As I read the journals describing a journey through a first term of serious college and listened to four sets of life stories and dreams, I thought of the early American women and their quilts, forming a fresh piece of covering while gathered together and sharing their lives through fabric and words.

Beth

Finding an appropriate quilt pattern for Beth was difficult until I remembered an incident in which she had gone out of her way to help a classmate with a sick child. I was interested to notice how someone who seemed to only observe others would involve herself in such an active manner. On reflection, I remembered that Beth's young son, Allen, was the main reason she was back in school and the focal point of her life. A 'Baby's Block' quilt that looked like a set of tumbling toy blocks for an infant to play with was an appropriate pattern for her.

Beth arrived at class early the first day of the day time class and took a seat on a side aisle, toward the back. She looked like a traditional college student wearing blue jeans, a winter jacket over her sweatshirt and a book bag slung over her shoulder. Her blond hair was in a short almost Buster Brown type cut, but the hair seemed darker at the roots. Her blue eyes and ruddy complexion went well with her light hair. She had the full complement of school material, including a book bag, books, notebooks, pens and pencils. She seemed to be observing all the first-day confusion intently, as if waiting for something to occur. After two weeks of classes and the drop/add period, I collected the usual information cards and found she had been out of high school for almost 2 years and had a young son.

With that newfound information, Beth became another nontraditional student who might give me information about their expectations and needs. She was generally quiet during class and was careful to turn her assignments in on time, if not early. Once toward the beginning of the semester, Beth called me to say that her son had a doctor's appointment and she would have to miss class -- would I please call her with any assignments for that day. She sat on the same row as another nontraditional student, but they did not seem to find much to talk about, unlike the

three women who sat together on the front row and constantly checked writing assignments, mathematics problems, and grocery lists with each other. She was not the type to wait after class for teacher contact, and I found it hard to get to know her, despite the fact that she had me for reading class as well as English. She seemed a private person, as if her experiences since high school had turned her inward, so as to protect herself and her young son. I was interested to learn during her first interview that she was getting married in March to the man she had dated for 5 years and who was the father of her son.

We had to delay her first interview for over a week because of an incident occurred that let me know she was very aware of her classmates and their lives. We saw Clair, another member of the class, standing by the pay telephone in the stairwell, waiting for a return call. I made a joking remark "just stand there, and someone will call you" to her, and she became upset. I immediately apologized for my flippancy and asked if there was a problem. The young woman said her baby was ill at home and that she was waiting for a relative to call her about a ride from school to the sick child. With that, I asked Beth if we could reschedule our meeting, so I could take the young woman home. Before we could arrange the trip, Beth had volunteered to take her classmate home and I watched the two young women walk quickly toward the parking lot.

Beth was living at home with her mother, father and young son when the semester began. In 1997, she had graduated from a public high school somewhat north of the college with her entering class, about a year and a half before she had entered Granite College. While in high school, she had taken courses on the vocational, not college preparatory, track and had been on the basketball and softball teams. During her senior year, Beth had taken English, economics, and technical mathematics. Her mother was basically a housewife, doing part-time clerical work

for her spouse's electrical business. Her father was a successful electrical contractor who had started his own business earlier. During this first semester in college, Beth was taking three developmental studies classes: English, reading and the introductory mathematics class. Her education was now very important to her, and her family wanted her to be a successful student.

Even though she had registered during the late open registration, she had managed to arrange her classes for Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, so she could be home with her son two days during the week. In addition to caring for a nearly 1-year old boy, she also kept house for herself and her parents, cleaned her father's electric shop and business offices, and did most of her studying on those two weekdays away from the campus.

Her two older sisters had attended college, one becoming a third grade teacher; the other a computer programmer. In the first interview, I asked Beth why she had chosen Granite College, she said her sister said it would be better to start out at a junior college, just to get back in the routine of school (INT_1). The sister who taught was married to a teacher herself, and these two young educators had talked with Beth about their careers. The sister who was a computer programmer was married to another computer programmer. Beth's parents did not attend college.

When I was able to interview Beth in March, 2 months into the semester, she was quietly excited about her wedding to her son's father. This event was to take place in about a week from our first interview. At one point in the interview, she showed me a picture of her wedding dress, and that led to more talk about her life at this time and her wedding plans. "We're just going to go to the courthouse. My parents said if we didn't have a wedding that they would help us get a place of our own. We're going to live at my house and get some bills paid off and then get an apartment or something" (INT_1). She also had confidence in his taking on the responsibilities for

their son, saying in the first interview that "he's a good daddy . . . He's done a lot of growing up [over the past year]." Her fiance had been working as electrician with her father's company for several years.

In her journal, she seemed much more excited about this event, writing on March 1, "In two weeks me and my fiancé will be married The day I have waited for so long. We went and picked out our wedding bands and I think that is when I got the most excited"(JNL_ March 1). Earlier that winter, her fiancé had given her a new engagement ring and Beth wrote in her journal

> it was like a new start. We had been going through some tough times before, but this was our chance to make a new start . . .When we picked it up [after it had been sized] he wouldn't let me wear it out of the store. We went to leave the mall and I was putting our son in the car and my fiancé was behind me and when I turned around, he was on his knees with the ring. Of course I said yes. This was my happiest moment (JNL_February18).

At the end of the semester, Beth was indeed married, with a beautiful wedding set on the third finger of her left hand. But other than the rings, she seemed the same quiet person who sat toward the back of the room in the row by the door. Yet as I observed her again, more closely, she had more sparkle than she had at the beginning of the term, a bit more confidence possibly based on her marriage and her success during her first term in college.

As described earlier, the interview with Beth was later in the semester than those of the other student informants because of her son's illness and her own generosity in taking a classmate to her own sick child. One of my first questions usually was about the student's expectations of college, and Beth admitted she had no idea what to expect from college, an admission which surprised me as she had two sisters who had attended college. In her journal she wrote, "So far, college is nothing like I expected. I had no idea what it would be like. I had the idea that it

would be hard" (JNL_3-3-99). In our first interview, she simply stated that no one had told her anything about college before she enrolled except to study hard. Her friends had not brought back college comments and advice to her so she depended on family members for information about college activities and classes. Most of her friends had gone to college, but she stayed too busy with her son, Allen, to talk with them.

Her scores on the placement test were generally average for a student who placed into developmental studies: 70 on reading, 2 points below passing, 34 on English, 26 points below passing, and 16 in mathematics, 14 below passing. Her exit scores in reading and English were excellent with an 80 on reading and an 86 on the English portion. This made me wonder how she would have scored if she had taken the tests immediately after high school. Because she had taken vocational subjects, her low mathematics score indicated her lack of any algebra in high school and she could not take the mathematics exit test until after two semesters of developmental mathematics. The lower mathematics scores did not surprise Beth for she knew her "weaknesses are in math. I really have to pay attention and practice math problems over and over" she commented in her journal of February 19, 1999. She found her new ability to concentrate helped her learn the new concepts faster than she did in high school.

Beth's young son was the primary motivation for her coming to college. This child had made major changes in her life in several ways, but she had returned to school because she "wanted to be a role model and to provide a good life for him"(INT_1). She had "hated high school" and yet she was attending college. She admitted in the first interview that she had never done her work in high school, but was now doing all of her college assignments. Her family and fiancé were very supportive of her decision to come to college after having the baby; in fact, her

fiancé was surprised and pleased that she would consider returning to school. "But," she said with a big smile, "I want him [Allen, her son] to have anything that he wants."

While she was at home with her son, she realized she had time to think about a lot of "stuff" which included wishing she had worked harder in high school. In her journal, she explored this topic further, writing, "My son has made a big difference in my life. If it weren't for him, I don't think I would be in college right now. There are times when I don't want to do my homework or study and I look at my son and tell myself that I've got to do it for him. He has really changed my life"(JNL_March 7, 1999).

The changes brought about by her son were very important to Beth. Writing in her journal, she stated that "my ideal job is a housewife. I'm not a real people person. My mom is a housewife and that is what I would like to do, at least until my son starts school. After he starts school, then I want to start teaching elementary physical education" (JNL_2-2-99). One appeal of that work was the casual dress which surprised me somewhat because she generally dressed carefully when she was in class. She had discussed a teaching career with her sister and brother-in-law, both teachers in local schools, and decided that was what she wanted to do after finishing college and watching her son grow up and begin school. She planned to transfer to a large state university when she had completed her basic courses in order to take courses for teacher certification.

More immediate goals focused on her changing life with her young son and soon, a husband. In her journal less than a month after beginning her classes she wrote "One year from now I hope to have my schedule worked out so I can be more helpful to my parents around the house . . . . In a year from now, I should have everything worked out. I have to have taught my

son as much as he can learn at his age. I hope to accomplish all of these things and be doing what I've listed one year from now" (JNL_January 31, 1999).

After Beth's decision to attend college, her future sister-in-law guided her through registration process. She did not remember thinking of any questions during registration but looked at her scores and planned her classes with the idea of being home with her son at least two days during the week. She did have to take the placement tests and thought she did well on them. All three of her placement test scores were only slightly under the passing numbers, but she was disappointed. "I thought I was doing good. . . . I was kind of disappointed. . . Kind of mad," she said, thinking of those critical numbers (INT_1). She expected to take developmental mathematics which was her worst subject in high school, and her scores on the mathematics portion of the placement test were much lower than her scores on the English and reading sections.

Beth liked the size of the early morning class which had been reduced from 25 to only 20 students by the end of the semester. She took time to observe the others and learn about them. She remembered the lively class discussion about "Teens in Dreamland" in which teenagers were described as irresponsible and unaware of the importance of education. She was surprised to learn that one of the most vocal class members, Andrew, was older than most of the other men in the class. "He seems so young and he has this child to worry about," was her surprised comment about him (INT_1). She had surprised me herself that day with her strong comments about the importance of discipline by parents and the importance of a high school education. This discussion was one of the rare occasions when she actively participated in the class.

Beth found that the most difficult part of attending classes was finding time to do

everything she was trying to do. Taking care of her son, doing family housework, studying, and having some time for herself and her fiancé made for a busy schedule. She "couldn't imagine going back to school after ten or fifteen years. I am so thankful that I don't have to work, go to school, and take care of my son. Trying to work all that into my schedule would be really hard"(JNL_ 2-25-99). The lack of time to do everything she wanted to accomplish became a theme in her journal during the semester. On March 8, 1999, she commented in her journal that the

> only problem I've had this semester is trying to work my schedule out around my son and my homework. MY son likes to have all my attention so it's hard for me to try and do my homework and give him the attention he wants. I usually have to wait until he takes a nap before I can get anything done. So in the two hours I have to myself while he's asleep I have to work fast. (JNL_ 3-8-99)

She was responsible for the laundry and cleaning at home as well as taking care of Allen and, of course, her school assignments. She was greatly appreciative of her parents' support of her education, commenting she didn't "know how I would do it if I had to hold down a job while trying to do everything that needs to be done"(JNL_ 3-8-99).

She noticed that her ability to concentrate had improved since her high school days. Beth also had made a major change in that in high school she never did homework or studied, but now in college she found she did not miss any homework and studied when she necessary. She attributed the changes to her son who "has really made a big difference in my life. If it weren't for him, I don't think I would be in college right now" (JNL_ 3-7-99).

The early morning English class that Beth attended was one of the most diverse classes in every way that I had taught at Granite College. At the beginning of the term the class included the five nontraditional Caucasian women, several older African American women, an older

Caucasian man and two older African American men, as well the traditional aged students. When we were talking about the class, I mentioned the diversity to Beth and asked her if she thought she was being treated differently from the traditional students. She responded that she did not see any differences in treatment because of her having a child (INT_1). One aspect of student life that impressed her was the friendliness of the students as seen in a journal comment. Writing in February she noted the friendliness and added "A lot of people in high school were not that friendly. I guess people are more mature once they get to college. I know I'm more mature now than I was in high school . . . All the friendly people is what I've seen [sic] my first month at Granite College" (JNL_ 2-16-99). She attributed that difference to the cost of college in contrast to the public high school, which caused students to take college more seriously than high school.

The college did not require teachers to give the each student a formal mid term reports as do most high schools. At the midpoint of the semester, Beth was concerned that she had no official idea of what her grades were. In her journal she wrote, "I would rather my teachers give us our grades every few weeks so we would know where we stand and how hard we need to work to improve our grades" (JNL_3-1-99). She had developed her own system of keeping track of her efforts by the grades on returned papers. Her personal system of grade recording and her new more serious attitude toward school seemed to keep her focused on doing her best work.

In our March interview, I asked her what she thought was the best part of the class so far. To my surprise, she thought that writing the essays in class had been most helpful. She preferred the essays written in class to those written on the computers in the writing lab because she found "myself going back and correcting too much and it takes me even longer. But when I'm in class, I

just start writing"(INT_ 1). She even liked having the three-part thesis of her five-paragraph essays written in the first paragraph so she could just look back to see what she had to write about in the rest of the essays. In general, her essays were acceptable and she wrote from her life experiences.

She seemed to realize her reading and writing courses were related, especially when the essay topics often related to the English class readings for the week. She was also taking an afternoon reading class with me and would ask questions about her writing during the reading class. She seemed to enjoy the reading class and began to make comments about her reading in her English journal. She was reading Message in a Bottle by Nicholas Sparks for her book report and commented that in her journal of March 3, 1999 "So far it's a really good book. Nicklas [sic] Sparks is a very good writer, this is my second book that I'm reading by him and I'm enjoying it.' She planned to read The Horse Whisperer for her second report because she missed seeing the film when it was first released. I suspected she missed the film because of the birth of her son who, as she mentioned frequently, took much of her time. She seemed to enjoy reading, stating that "Reading is very relaxing for me and it's a good thing to do just before bedtime"(JNL_ 3-3-99).

When we talked in early March, she felt she was doing better in the subjects that had been difficult in high school, especially in mathematics. In her journal, she wrote, "My ability to concentrate has really improved since I've grown older and come back to school. . . . It has really helped me in school. I'm catching on quickly to what we're doing in class. My weaknesses are in math. I really have to pay attention and practice math problems over and over" (JNL_2-19-99). Very often, in short, informal conversations before or after her reading or English class, she

would reiterate how proud she was of coming so far since high school. In several journal entries she described her poor study habits in high school, her lack of interest in school achievement, and her very different attitude at this point in her life.. In a journal entry, she admitted, "That's one thing I wish I could do over, my high school years" (JNL_2-19-99).

Her entire family was very pleased that Beth had chosen to return to formal education after her high school experiences. Her mother was very involved with her education, from simple encouragement to keeping Allen three days a week while Beth was in class Granite College. Her fiancé was surprised and pleased that she was going to college after spending a year caring for their son. Beth's concern was working her schedule around her son and her homework.

> My son likes to have all my attention so it's hard for me to try and do my homework and give him the attention he wants. I usually have to wait until he takes a nap before I can get anything done. So in the two hours I have to myself while he's asleep I have to work fast. I have a lot to do between homework, laundry and cleaning. I am fortunate enough that I don't have to work, thanks to my parents. I don't know how I would do it if I had to hold down a job while trying to do everything that needs to be done. (JNL_ 3-8-99).

It seemed that Beth and her mother had agreed to exchange housework for child care and that agreement worked to the benefit of everyone.

Beth did not usually involve herself in the before class chatter of the other students, either nontraditional or of her own age. She was thinking about her college experience and how little she had known about what to expect. In her journal she made a suggestion about orientation which lasted about two hours and was optional at the time she registered. She wrote that

> I would change Granite College by adding an orientation and a class to help you learn about everything that goes a long with attending college. If it weren't for my fiance's sister who attends Granite College also I would be so lost. I still don't know my way around campus. All my classes are in the same building. . . . If I were to have to go to another building for some reason, I would have no idea where I would need to go. I think it's unfair to the students to leave us so clueless to where our classes are. We pay to attend school. We should at least be shown around campus. This is what I would change about Granite College. (JNL_ 2-14-99)

This strong expression in her journal was in contrast to her usual silence during class, yet showed she was observing and listening to her classmates as they discussed their early experiences at the college.

At the end of the semester I asked her if she would change anything about it and she said that she would only change her grades as they stood at that day. She had an 88 in the English class and she wanted two more points so she would receive an A in the class. I laughed with her and remarked on the change from her high school days. She had been surprised to find herself taking the developmental studies classes, but then again, she remembered her lack of seriousness in her high school days. In our last interview, I asked with a smile if the class met her expectations, even if she really didn't know what to expect. She seemed to feel that the class had met her vague expectations, but I sensed a new maturity and pride about her answers.

With her growing confidence after her marriage, her pride in her grades, and her joy in her son, I was again reminded, in a different way, of the Baby's Block quilt with its youthful joy as the blocks appeared to be tumbling over the quilt's front. Beth had indeed made a change from an unconcerned child to a responsible and caring young adult.

Linda

As the first potential student informant I noticed among the students in my day time basic composition class, Linda appeared as a cheerful, interested-looking student who sat on the front row. After I knew her better, I realized that a Log Cabin quilt would be an appropriate pattern

for Linda because of the large extended and blended family that looked to her as the mother figure. This quilt design is formed by adding strips of fabric in longer and longer lengths around a square base with light and dark solid or patterned fabrics on opposite sides of the bright inner square, which represented the fireplace of a log cabin. Linda had seen both the light and dark sides of life and marriage, and she was determined to keep the bright side closer to her and her family.

Linda looked more like the typical nontraditional student than any I'd seen this year. A hearty woman with a great-sounding laugh, she sat on the front row with two other older students. She had brown hair with blonde overlay, blue eyes, and usually wore slacks or jeans, and mom-type tee shirts. She seemed to be relaxed and having fun being back in school. She had several children, a very supportive husband, did not work outside the home at this time, and seemed to be in a good place for herself. Linda's goal was becoming an elementary school teacher. She liked English, was really worried about her developmental reading class and was coping with mathematics. When I arrived for the early class, she was usually already seated in the classroom, mathematics book out and talking to another student from her mathematics class about their homework. I liked her from the beginning because she was so open about her life and yet very conservative when it came to her family and children.

Linda came from a family of four sisters, mother and father. She grew up in a small town in Georgia. Her father was a truck driver, and her mother was a secretary. Both of her parents were high school graduates, and her mother was a recent graduate of a private university where she had majored in criminal justice. Linda left high school in tenth grade to get married at age sixteen, and have her first child with Stan, the father of her two children. In our first interview, she

admitted she "never had that late adolescent stage of life" and added that when she returned to school, her husband was concerned that she "may just decide I like school and not do my family. I'm not, I told him that's fine, you go thinking that, but that's not the way that it's going to be" (INT_1)

Linda had known her husband, Stan, more than eighteen years, since high school. They were married after her ninth grade year and lived together five years. Her oldest daughter was born in 1986, and when this girl was about a year and a half old, Linda and Stan were divorced. Linda lived with her parents and worked at Wal-Mart part-time for several years. While she was divorced, she enrolled in Granite College and began developmental English and mathematics classes, but did not complete the courses. About seven years ago, Linda and Stan remarried and had at the time of this study a blended family of two 'ours' and three 'his' children. Linda is the mother of Stan's oldest and youngest daughters. The two boys and one girl from the other marriage live with their mother in the same neighborhood as Stan and Linda and the children spend much of their time at Linda's home. In our first interview Linda stated she "knew I had to get things right with her [Stan's second wife] for the children's sake. My husband sometimes can't stand it. He says, 'What are ya'll? Best friends now?" (INT_1).

Stan drove a cement truck and was a production manager at a cement plant in west central Georgia. He has considered returning to school and entering a health care profession, either in nursing or as a physician's assistant. According to Linda, this ambition was a response to his 8-year-old daughter's multiple heart surgeries. He has been very supportive of Linda's efforts to attend college, and Linda wrote, "I hope my husband knows how much I really love and appreciate him. Without his support I know I wouldn't make it through school. He has always

supported whatever I decide to do" (JNL_1-14-99). He worked during the day and yet found time to take family responsibilities at night, like making supper or getting the children to bed. In her first interview, Linda confided that her husband even worried about when she would complete her homework, asking her "Am I going to have to get onto [scold] you like I do the children?" but that has only happened once and apparently, according to Linda, made for some discussion after the children were settled for the night. At the end of the semester when she told Stan of her 92 average, his response was "Well, gosh, that's the best you've ever done" (INT_2).

Linda felt that school was not easy, and actually tough for her. In our second interview, Linda mentioned that she had attended a college success seminar sponsored by , the college association of nursing students, and the college organization for nontraditional students, and found it quite helpful. The seminar stressed time management skills and having a positive attitude toward the college experience. This was very helpful even though Linda thought she had learned how important managing time was since her first experiences at Granite College in 1990. This was important for she thought she was "like my mom. Mama constantly had to study to pass" (INT_2).

Linda hoped to update her computer skills because it was difficult to get a good paying job with the skills she had used several years ago when she worked as a secretary. But beyond that, she "knows there's something more, but right now, I'm not sure what it is any more" (INT_1). When in high school and elementary school, she thought of being a teacher, an architect, and a meteorologist. However, she knew she enjoyed children and planned to be a kindergarten teacher when she completed school this time. She wanted to have an impact on children's lives like her own second grade teacher had on hers, and like her six-year-old daughter's

kindergarten teacher. In her career paper, Linda researched the teaching profession today and interviewed a teacher in her daughter's school, learning that her reasons and plans for her future career were consistent with the realities of combining school, work, and a busy family life.

After being out of school almost 9 years, working and raising a family, the variety of tasks seemed difficult for Linda and she was very concerned about the number of activities she felt she needed to accomplish. At the end of a frustratingly busy weekend, Linda wrote,

> I felt really guilty for not doing homework, but after the football game, back to church and then to bed. This morning the house was such a mess that it took forever to clean . . . I only did one reading today and I have 3 more plus my essay for English. And I have about one more hour tonite and tomorrow to get this done . . . . This college stuff seems tough and it's not. I've just allowed myself to get behind. I'll get it done. (JNL_1-18-99)

Later in that same journal entry, she continued "the rough draft is done on my essay. Boy, it sure was scary. I know it's not perfect, and it may not be exactly as she wants it, but I've tried my best and put forth an effort. So tomorrow I will get it typed and hope for the best." Linda found that family activities including sports events, church, and children's school, her own school work, and household management were time-consuming, and that she was fortunate that she was aware of the importance of time management. She took advantage of help from the Granite College organization for nontraditional students in finding some other older students to talk with and for any more formal support that was offered by the club.

> To me school is not easy . . . In fact, it's tough for me. I have got to learn better time Management. In reading Dr. M's 'College Success' paper (a handout from a presentation sponsored by the college organization for nontraditional students and the college organization for nursing students) time management is number (2) two in learning how to learn. I have a positive attitude and will start doing better with my time (JNL_2-7-99).

During her first interview, she remarked that the mixture of ages, races, economic status and gender in her class did not surprise her, "it wasn't any different when I went to Western Tech with the amount of students" (INT_1). Linda liked the tone of the class, saying, "It's not boring. There are times when you are serious, but there's other times when you're not, which makes for a very relaxed atmosphere" (INT_1).

Linda was a friendly person and after only a month in the class knew the names of most of her classmates. Several times younger students would come up to her and ask her how she did a certain lesson, usually English or mathematics, and decided "a lot of them will come up to us and ask us how we did this one and how did you do that. I guess because we speak out in class. There's a lot of times D and I both think we better shut-up because she [Mrs. C, the instructor] keeps telling the front row [where most of the nontraditional women students sat] to be quiet" (INT_1). This attention in classes proved a successful strategy for Linda since she had an 88 agverage at the middle of the semester. She was concerned about the computyerized exit examination at the end of the semester, called by the acronym COMPASS. After several practice sessions, Linda seemed to feel better about the test, but still had misgivings.

The day after taking the COMPASS exit test Linda met me for our final interview. Her score on the test was 80, 20 points over the passing score of 60. I commented on her cheerfulness and she responded, "I hated to brag. I wasn't trying to brag. People like girls in our class . . . they would ask how I did, and they didn't make it. Well, I couldn't help it. I was like, 'I passed! I passed!' I didn't want them to feel bad, but I was excited for myself" (INT_2). The 4 months since January had been good for her in at least two observable ways: confidence and academic progress. Still, she was hesitant to take full credit for her progress and I pointed out in

our last interview, "You sat on the front row and asked questions if you didn't know something. They [students who did not pass the exit test] didn't. They sat there and figured they knew it from high school. And you knew you had been out of school for a while. You wanted to get on with things." The next day, Linda did pass the Reading COMPASS with a score of 80, six points over required score of 74.

Linda had successfully completed her first complete semester of college, passing two essential developmental studies courses. She was looking forward to a well-earned vacation with her family before returning to classes. With the support of her extended, blended family and her own persistence, she was excited about her future, making the brightness of the cabin fire burn more intensely. At this time in her life, Linda and her family were seeing the bright side of the 'Log Cabin' pattern quilt that seemed to symbolize her. Linda, whose family looked to her for care, guidance and encouragement, seemed to resemble the Log Cabin quilt with its structured pattern of light and dark rectangles surrounding a central, fire-bright square.

Many women do think differently from many men, as demonstrated by the intensely personal research done by Gilligan (1982), Belenky et al. (1986) and their associates in which women trusted the research team enough to share their intimate thoughts and conceptions of how they gained their knowledge. If women were different than men, and more women of both traditional and non-traditional ages were attending college than before, what should higher education institutions do to support these women, and what did the women need and want in the ways of support as they further their education? To understand this, comments from women in higher education who work with returning female students, and then examples of programs for women would make it apparent how women's thought processes relate to their college

experiences.

The non-traditional college woman was obviously difficult to define, yet she was one of the major groups on college campuses at this time. More and more of these older women will be attending college classes; in fact, they could comprise more than 30% of the campus population in as few as 10 years.(Astin, 1990). Astin stated that the goals of nontraditional students are many, their motivation is high, their needs are individual. The goals and needs of women returning to college are different from those of male students, as defined by their differences in moral and social development (Astin, 1990). Women may return to college to further their careers, satisfy inner needs, or better support their families. These reasons often are based on psychological needs of relating, other directedness, and responsibility. The female college student of traditional age has been treated much like her male counterpart, and most of these young women were still in the received or subjective stage of knowing. The more difficult, procedural means of knowing could be developed while she was a student, but this was not an automatic part of her college education. The inner knowing was often developed outside the formal academic structures through relationships, role models, and experiences that often occur in college, but could also occur elsewhere. That type of knowing was not an automatic gain of the post secondary educational experience (Belenky, et al., 1986).

Even before a woman actually enrolled in post secondary education, whether it was 2-year college, 4-year college, or technical education, she has had the idea of returning. Catherine Heffernan (personal communication, November 1998), the Return-to-College advisor at Agnes Scott College, said there was usually a 2-year period from the initial thought of returning and the actual approach to an educational setting. General interest publications, women's magazines,

radio and television programs often feature interviews with women who have returned to college or other training and been successful, often in the face of challenging obstacles. Heffernan stated that magazines and newspapers, especially the living and business sections, describe new careers opening to women in particular and careers that offer greater employment opportunities for anyone willing to retrain or seek further training in a similar field.

Sybil Myers (personal communication, October, 1998), who worked with nontraditional students at Kennesaw State University, noted that the first place a woman interested in furthering her education obtains information was often the media. From Myers' descriptions of these students thoughts, it appeared that many of these women were still in Belenky's subjective stage of knowing. They wanted something more than they presently had, whether it was related to family situation, job duties or simply personal feelings. The idea took hold, ever so tentatively, and remained until they were ready to take a more focused step or gather more specific, personalized information. Through informal, short continuing education programs offered by various institutions, women could hear straightforward information about a 'return to college' program in a particular institution, and ask questions they may have had related to their own return to college. Kennesaw State University sponsored a "Preview Night," a one-hour information session for women who are interested in college programs, not necessarily, but possibly, at Kennesaw. The women received material with information about the college, and a follow-up form to return if they were interested in Kennesaw specifically. DeKalb Technical Institute advertised its "New Connections" program in local newspapers, prominently featuring a contact telephone number (DeKalb Technical Institute, 1997). These types of efforts could recruiting tools for the sponsoring institution, but the programs and speakers also offered a

general contact with a college. The speaker or speakers introduced topics such as financial aid, time management, academic requirements, and support groups for the non-traditional student and what it took to be a student at this stage of life. This information was added to the initial idea of "mom going back to school" and often strengthened the thought, while raising more questions. Several other research studies and sources confirmed these localized descriptions of women's thoughts and decision making processes while making the actual decision to return to school (Altmaier & McNabb, 1984; Craig, 1995; Marino, 1997). Perhaps because the small size of the student body, the income level of most student applicants, and their greater range of life experiences, conversations with Catherine Heffernan at Agnes Scott College provided greater insights into the thought patterns of return to college women than comments from other, larger institutions. Heffernan and her colleagues at Agnes Scott met with a small group of students and worked with them intensively, in very small groups or one-on-one during the pre-admission counseling period, gaining their confidence and sharing fears and feelings of confusion. Myers (personal communication, October, 1998) at Kennesaw State University found that there was often open conflict between a woman's doing something for herself and her sense of responsibility. Those who resolved this difficult in favor of returning to an academic setting were often more successful than those who tried to do for others and themselves at the expense of both directions of responsibility.

Once the initial contact was made with an institution, it could be as long as 2 more years until the prospective student actually enrolled. During this time, the college and the student-to-be could take several steps in the advisement process. At the University of Hartford, once a woman made a call indicating interest in the program, she was sent an information packet and encouraged

to set up an appointment with the coordinator of student advisement (Gladstone, 1987). Within 2 weeks, the coordinator made an appointment with the potential student, often during the workday at the student's convenience. If an office appointment could not be arranged, the initial advisement was done by telephone at a time when student and advisor could have an uninterrupted conversation. The key to this type of initial advisement was to convey feelings of warmth, acceptance and credibility.

In a conversation about older students, Agnes Scott College's Heffernan described a similar process with a final interview before actual admission during which the psychological aspects of a return to college were discussed with prospective nontraditional students. These women often dropped out of an educational program because their expectations were very high and somewhat unrealistic. Most of these women had separated from their families of origin, and made an independent life of their own, often including both career and family. The student often was in a transition stage such as a corporate downsizing affecting the student or her spouse, divorce, or widowhood. One question Heffernan often asked "Are you prepared to be 'poor' for a few years in money and power in order to receive the Agnes Scott degree?" She was referring to a loss of income, a loss of power in a job in which a woman had achieved her status on the basis of effort not degrees, or a loss of time while she worked at part-time jobs such as a salesclerk, a waitress in order to meet the financial demands of a private college. After reviewing transcripts, life experiences, even old test scores, Heffernan often advised women who have been out of school more than ten years to attend word processing classes, so they would not need to learn both academic and technical skills at one time, a situation that could lead to additional psychological stress. With this in mind, many students who ultimately enter Agnes Scott begin at

a 2-year college, often DeKalb [now Georgia Perimeter] College, as it serves the geographical area from which Agnes Scott draws its non-traditional students.

In addition to the pre-enrollment advising, nontraditional students often needed thorough orientation to their new institution once they had been accepted. Colleges traditionally offer orientation to new students, but nontraditional students needed a separate orientation where the issues were not those of "first time away from home" and "getting along with your roommate," but those of computer literacy and balancing family time with student time. In an orientation focused on the non-traditional student, the older student felt more comfortable, seeing other, similar faces around her. This was in keeping with the looking to others for ideas as well as focusing on the responsibility for others which the female learner often carries (Belenky et al., 1986). An atmosphere of "no question is too trivial" was very important in this early stage of academic life. The "New Connections" program at Georgia's technical schools offered workshops on stress management and assertiveness training to boost the confidence of its participants. Carol Gladstone (1987) at Hartford University, the college orientation placed a campus tour high on its orientation agenda, since the students mentioned they did not have time to look for offices between classes, work and home.

The great changes in the lives of non-traditional students was usually a large part of the discussions at the local organization for nontraditional students meetings which this researcher sponsored for three years. The comments and questions raised by the students met through this group contributed to the formation of the driving questions in this research project, and to the researcher's commitment to the nontraditional college student, male or female. The determination, the dedication, and the constant juggling acts these students performed first

aroused my curiosity as to how they accomplished as much as they did, and then drove me to investigate why they were so different from traditional college students and what would be the most effective way of teaching them.

Colors, patterns, pieces of cloth, and ideas joined together to form purposeful coherence of thought or coverings are the joys of quilting frames and the women who surround them. The quality of a quilt is measured by the intricacy of its design, the precision of its crafting, and, in the case of antique quilts, the state of preservation. A nontraditional student's experience as she enters college is measured quantitatively by retention and academic performance and qualitatively by her relationship with the academic institution, by the pleasure the experience gives her and by her growth as a thinking individual. As Linda demonstrated, for the nontraditional student, classes are only one part of her life. The several layers to that life are bound together by an ambition to grow as an individual and desire to successfully complete a college degree.

One reason for my research was to learn how best to help nontraditional students, especially the women, as they entered college through a developmental studies program. I have descriptions of four colleges, one, I'll admit, without any developmental studies students, but the other three very different schools have a relatively high number of 'our students' enrolled. It's time to dream and make quilts. I'll give a group a description of an institution, quilt pieces, and your mission is to first design a support program for nontraditional students, especially those in developmental classes, and then to design a quilt square using the fabric pieces in your supply bag. After a time of discussion and planning, we'll get back together to share both program plans and quilt squares.

Virginia F. Clark, PhD

REFERENCES

Altmaier, E. M., & McNabb, T. F. (1984). A reentry workshop for nontraditional students. Journal of College Student Personnel, 25(January), 88-90.

Ashar, H., & Skenes, R. (1993). Can Tinto's student departure model be applied to nontraditional students? Adult Education Quarterly, 43(Winter), 90-100.*

Astin, H. S. (1990). Educating women: A promise and a vision for the future. American Journal of Education(August), 479-493.

Atwell, N. (1987). In the middle. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Atwell, N. (1991). Side by side: Essays on Teaching to Learn. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Barefoot, B. O. (Ed.). (1998). Exploring the evidence: Reporting outcomes of first-year seminars. (Vol. II). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina.*

Bartholomae, D., & Petrosky, A. (1986). Facts, artifacts, and counterfacts. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Bean, J. P. & Metzner, B. S., (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. Review of Educational Research, 55(4). 485-540.

Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. M., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). Women's ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind. BasicBooks, a Division of HarperCollinsPublishers.

Chickering, A. W., & Reisser, L. (1993). Education and identity. (2nd ed.). San Francisco:

Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Choy, S. P., & Premo, M. K. (1995). Profile of older undergraduates: 1989-1990 (Statistical Analysis Report). Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.*

Code, L. (1991). What can she know? Feminist theory and the construction of knowledge. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Cohen, A. M., & Brawer, F. B. (1996). The American community college. (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Cookson, P. S. (1989). Recruiting and retaining adult students: A practice perspective. New Directions for Continuing Education, 41(Spring 1989), 3-12.*

Corbett, E. P. J. (1990). Classical rhetoric for the modern student. (3rd. ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Craig, C. M. (1995, 19-23 May, 1995). Curricular innovations: Empowering non-traditional students. Paper presented at the Georgia Conference on Developmental Education / NADE, Jekyll Island, GA.

Cross, K. P. (1981). Adults as learners. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.*

Cross, K. P. (1998). From taking teaching seriously to taking learning seriously. American Association for Higher Education. Atlanta, GA.*

Culross, R. (1996). Real students, real standards. Change. 28 (6) 50-52.

Daliz, L. A. (1987). Martha meets her mentor: The power of teaching relationships. Change, 19(4), 35-43.*

DeKalb Technical Institute (1997). New connections at DeKalb Tech. Clarkston, GA: DeKalb Technical Institute.

Dickson, M. (1995). It's not like that here. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

DiPardo, A. (1993). A kind of passport. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.*

Ecker, P., & Calhoun-French, D. (1995). General education at jefferson community college: Accountability and integrity. New Directions for Community Colleges, 92(Winter 1995), 33-41.

Fontana, A. & Frey, J. H.(1994). Interviewing: The art of science. In N. K. Denzin & Y. K. Lincoln (Eds.). Handbook of qualitative research. (pp. 361-376) Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.*

Frederickson, E. (1998). Silence and the nontraditional writer. Teaching English in the Two Year College, 25(2), 115-121.

Gillet, J. W., & Temple, C. (1982). Understanding reading problems: Assessment and instruction. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gilligan, C. (1992). In a different voice. (2nd. Ed.) Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Giczkowski, W. (1995) Are general education requirements right for adult students? Adult learning. 6 (6) 12-13.

Gladstone, C. (1987). Advising the nontraditional student: Putting theory into practice. Lifelong Learning, 10(April), 37-43.

Henry, J. (1992). Belles lettres: A qualitative study of student - teacher exchange of literary letters. Unpublished Doctoral, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.

Henry, J. (1995). If not now. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Horowitz, H. L. (1987). Campus life. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.*

Jaffe, B. (1997, March 12-15, 1997). Student success in college composition through the puente project model. Paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Phoenix, AZ.

Janesick, V. J. (1994). The dance of qualitative research: Metaphor, methodolatry, and meaning. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), Handbook of Qualitative Research (pp. 209-219). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.*

Kilcrease, K. (1995). Creating a sense of community for adult students. Adult Learning, 6(4), 9.

Knoblauch, C. H. & Brannon, L. (1984). Rhetorical traditions and the teaching of writing. Portsmouth, NH. Heineman / Boynton / Cook.

Kraemer, B. (1996, March 23-26). Meeting the needs of nontraditional students: Retention and transfer studies. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the North Central Association, Chicago, IL.

Lofland, J. & Lofland, J. H. (1995). Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative observation and analysis. Boston: Wadsworth Publishing Company.*

Lowman, J. (1996). Assignments that promote and integrate learning. In R. J. Menges (Ed.), Teaching on solid ground. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.*

Mahler, C. B. (1973). Once upon a quilt: Patchwork design and technique. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company.

Marino, C. A. (1997). The student returns: Challenges of the returning student. Paper

presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Phoenix, AZ.

McCormick, K. (1994). The culture of reading and the teaching of English. New York: Manchester University Press.

Miller, J. B. (1976). Toward a new psychology of women. Boston: Beacon Press.*

Morrison, M. K. (1994). "The old lady in the student lounge": Integrating the adult female student into the college classroom. In M. Reynolds (Ed.), Two year college english: Essays for a new century (pp. 26-36). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.*

Murphy, J. J. (Ed.). (1987). Quintilian: On the teaching of speaking and writing.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Murphy, M. L. (1994). Why do nontraditional female students persist in community college developmental studies reading classes? Unpublished Doctoral, University of Georgia, Athens, GA.

Murray, D. M. (1985). A writer teacher writing. (second. ed.). Boston: Houghton Miflin Company.

Oliver, C. (1995). The community college. Niagra Falls, NY.

Papatzikou-Cochran, E. (1994). Giving voice to women in the basic writing and language minority classroom. Journal of Basic Writing, 13(1), 78-90.

Pascarella, E. T. & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). How college affects students. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Rendon, L. I. (1995, March 1). Facilitating retention and transfer for first generation students in community colleges. Paper presented at the Rural Community College Initiative, Tempe, AZ.

Rose, M. (1983). Remedial writing courses: A critique and a proposal. College English,

45(2), 109-128.

Shaughnessy, M. P. (1977). Errors and expectations. New York: Oxford University Press.

Snyder, T. D. (1996). Digest of educational statistics. Washington, D. C.: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

Spradley, J. P. (1980). Participant observation. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.

St. Pierre, S. (1989). Understanding the nontraditional student. NASPA Journal. 26 (Spring), 78-84.

Steltenpohl, E., & Shipton, J. (1986). Facilitating a successful transition to college for adults. Journal of Higher Education, 57(6), 637-658.

Stewart, D. W. & Shamdasani, P. M. (1998). Focus group research: Exploration and discovery. In L. Bickman & D. J. Rog, (Eds.) Handbook of applied social research methods. (pp. 505-526) Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.*

Taylor, K., & Marienau, C. (Eds.). (1995). Learning environments for women's adult development: Bridges toward change. (Vol. 65). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. Review of Educational Research, 45(1), 89-125.

Troyka, L. Q.(1985). Perspectives on legacies and literacy in the 1980s. College Composition and Communication, 33 (3), 252-266).

Troyka, L. Q., & Nudleman, J. (1999). Steps in composition. (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

Wigginton, B. E.(1985). Sometimes a shining moment: The foxfire experience. New York: Anchor Books

Wolfgang, M. E. & Dowling, W. D. (1981). Differences in motivation of adult and younger undergraduates. Journal of Higher Education, 52(6), 640-648.

An * indicates a reference consulted while writing the dissertation 'Reactions of nontraditional women students in an introductory class: Quilting conversations (2000) but not used in the presentation given at the Conference on Research in Developmental Education, October 2001.